

## Secondary Stress

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Marvin listened compassionately as Ray raged about being fired. As Ray vented Marvin became aware of tightness in his shoulders. He also noted a familiar tic in his left eye. After Ray left Marvin wondered why he was feeling the symptoms of stress. After all, it was Ray who had lost his job, not him.

As soon as we perceive a slight, a worry, or a bit of challenge, our bodies involuntarily march into action. A particular set of chemicals is released in these situations. These chemicals are meant to assist the body in the need for "fight or flight." These chemicals are not only released in the person directly affected by a provocative situation.

What Marvin was experiencing was secondary stress experienced directly by Ray. It is not always just the primary person on the scene of a stressor who experiences a stress reaction. Examples of a secondary stress reaction are children hearing or watching a national disaster on television, parents witnessing or hearing about their adult children having problems, or the spouse of a police officer listening to the traumatic experience of their beloved police officer husband or wife.

Powerful stress related chemicals urge the body to act. They are released in the person being acted upon and those nearby. Often, people in a stressful situation are quite literally forced to experience these things sitting down whether the primarily stressed or secondarily stressed. Listening to the problems of adult children where one knows it is best to keep quiet for example, does not allow for one to take action which is what the stressors "want" the body to do. Similarly, direct stress also may be a sitting down proposition: At a conference table, driving children to and from appointments, facing differences with friends, all can trigger stress chemicals to be released while the body has no place to "go" to resolve the flush of "take action" chemicals.

You also may be surprised at how often you experience small "rushes" of "adrenalin." Release of stress through prayer, talking to a trusted individual who will not overly react themselves, and writing in a journal will help. Change also relieves the effect of stress. Things like driving a different way to work or the grocery store, going to a different place to do paper work, singing songs out loud in the car instead of being quiet or the reverse sound simple. These simple changes or others like them can relieve the mind and body of some of the stress chemicals.

Physical activity is the most direct and full way to release stress. Walking is the most accessible physical way for stress to be released out of the body.

If there is little or no physical activity to work these chemicals off, the stress hormones assault the body.

Whatever outlet you choose, awareness is an important step when coping with stress. Do not underestimate the importance of spiritual health and the degree to which God is interested in helping you overcome stress reactions.

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